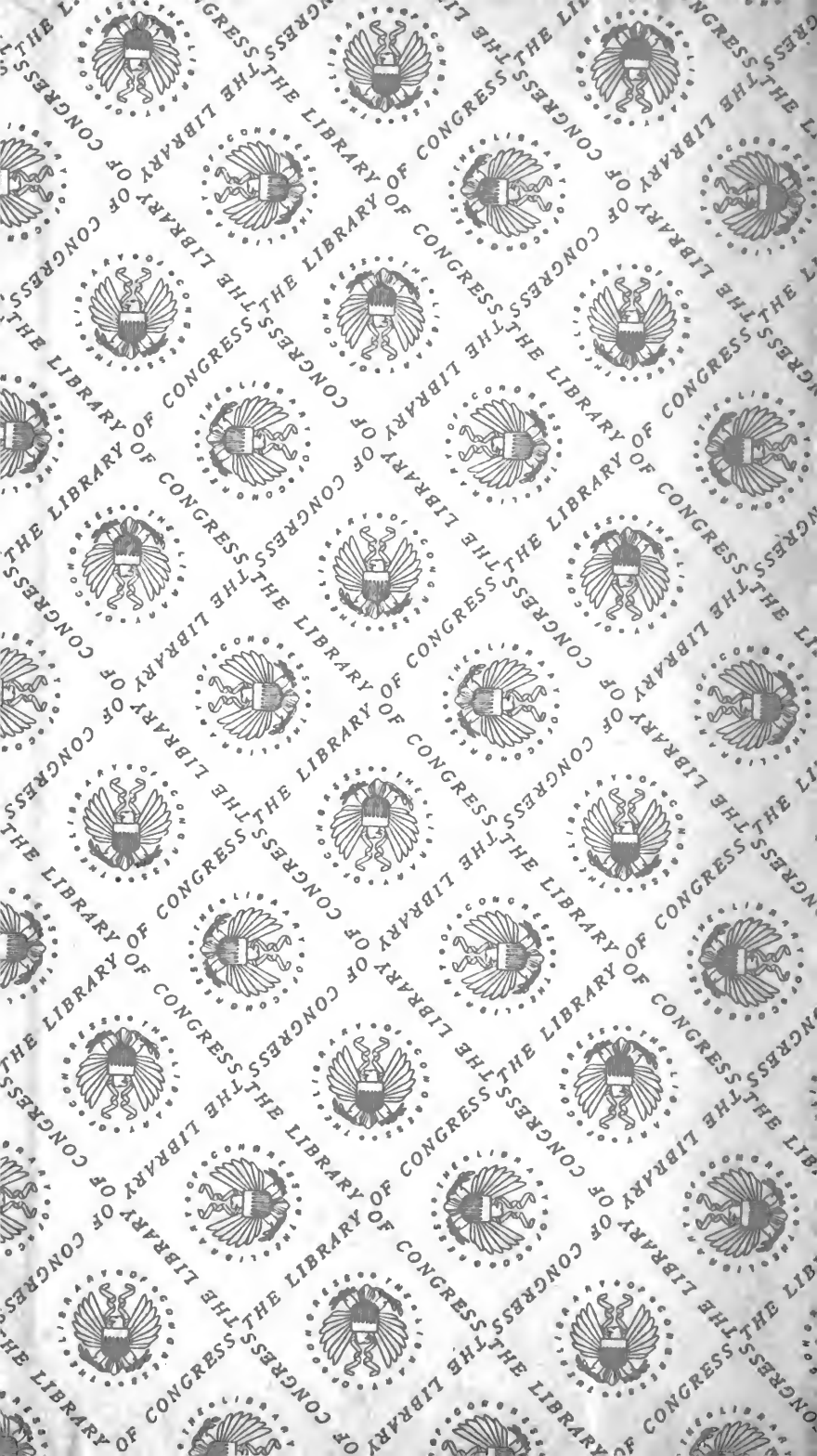
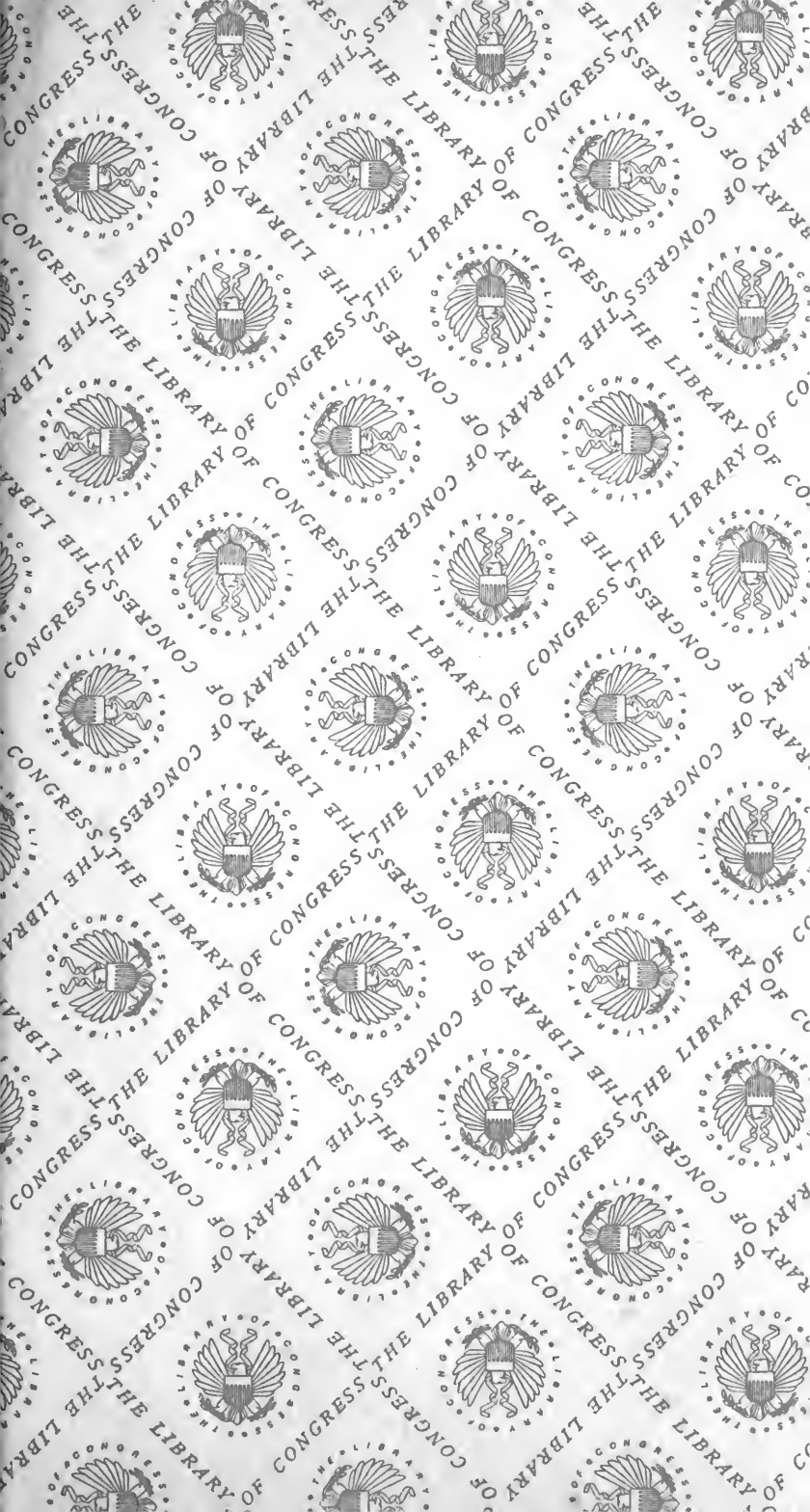


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Military Order of the Loyal Legion  
OF THE  
United States.



COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.



WAR PAPERS.

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“Personal Experiences in the Volunteer Navy  
During the Civil War.”

PREPARED BY COMPANION

Acting Ensign

JOSEPH M. SIMMS,

late U. S. Navy,

AND

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF DECEMBER 2, 1903.

*advt*

*Aug 28*

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## Personal Experiences in the Volunteer Navy During the Civil War.

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My service in the Civil War began in April, 1861, with three months' enlistment, in the presence of President Lincoln, at the front of the White House, a few days after the bombardment of Fort Sumter.

We were mustered in for the defence of the Nation's Capital, and what speaks well for the District is that out of 13,000 who were subject to military service, 4,720 promptly volunteered upon Mr. Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops.

It was well known that the quota of the District under that call was only 1,627, so more than double the quota was furnished by our city, and a larger percentage than was furnished by any State.

As it is of Fort Fisher and my personal experience that I am to talk, and of the fall of the fort, as well as of the relation it bore to the final collapse of the Southern Confederacy, I will, as far as possible, avoid relating much that happened elsewhere than in the vicinity of Federal Point, N. C.

There was at the northern entrance of the Cape Fear river a strong line of earthworks 2,580 yards in length—land face of 682 yards and a sea face of 1,898 $\frac{1}{3}$  yards—both faces bearing upon the sea.

Some of the pictures, as well as some of the stories, presented

to the public are so ridiculously inaccurate that I am moved to relate my experience and to tell of the naval assault as I saw it.

Fort Fisher was considered the strongest fortress of the sort in the world, and was pronounced impregnable. The works were constructed under the supervision of General William H. C. Whiting, of North Carolina, who graduated from West Point in 1845, sixteen years before his State seceded from the Union.

Experts in the line of engineering had conceded General Whiting to be the ablest constructing engineer in the United States Army at that time, and that his grandest work was in the planning of Fort Fisher.

I need only mention that excellent lawyer and patriotic officer, General Benjamin F. Butler, who in his attempt to capture Fort Fisher and allow Admiral Porter to present the works as a Christmas gift to the Government in 1864 failed; and how many of the General's friends, and all of his enemies abused him as best they knew how. Many persons at that time very much doubted the General's military ability in the field, and it was thought this impression had some ill effect upon our undertaking at Federal Point in December, 1864.

There were, at the time of assault, not one hundred guns, as stated by some one, but there were in the fort twenty-one and in the adjacent batteries seventeen guns, total guns, thirty-eight, and they were enough for us.

On the 24th and 25th of December, however, there were, according to Colonel Lamb's own statement, forty-four heavy guns brought into action.

Lieutenant Commander K. Randolph Breese, the Admiral's Fleet Captain, had the command on shore, and Lieutenant Commander James Parker, the *Minnesota's* Executive Officer, led in the assault upon the fort, and I was at his side. There was an officer upon Mr. Parker's left at the time whom I did not then know.

During the summer and to December, 1864, naval officers were quite at fever heat at and about Hampton Roads, James River, and Norfolk, Va., over exchanging of prisoners, torpedo attacks, boat expeditions, etc.

We were then daily witnesses to the fact that the Confederates were either the meanest people on earth or they had but little themselves to eat. There were many of us, however, who felt that it was because of the scarcity of food that our soldiers and sailors, exchanged prisoners, came back to us in such emaciated condition.

From the 12th of October, 1864, when Admiral Porter assumed command, up to the time we went to the coast to attack the fortifications at Cape Fear, for which the Army and Navy had been so long planning, there were calls for all sorts of boat expeditions where there was extra risk of life.

Now comes the great change for our squadron—"hurry scurry," and the final move for the large fleet of ships. It was: "On to Fort Fisher."

Commodore Joseph Lanman was now in command of our ship, having relieved Lieutenant Commander J. H. Upshur, who went to command of the *A. D. Vance*.

There was a great number of men transferred to us from the Army on the James at this time, and both officers and enlisted men were kept pretty busy drilling at the great guns from early morning until night, and as the men became proficient in great gun drill many of them were distributed among the vessels of the squadron which was to soon move.

On October, 30, 1864, the monitor *Monadnock* arrived at Hampton Roads. This was the monitor which Admiral Porter had, in his report, after the first attack upon Fort Fisher, said could go to any part of the world and fight.

The *Monadnock* came into the harbor of Callao, Peru, soon after the Spanish fleet under Admiral Nunez bombarded that

city. I was there at the time, attached to the U. S. steamer *Wateree*, Commander Francis K. Murray; and Winfield Scott Schley was Executive; but before the battle both of them were relieved by Commander Leonard Paulding and Lieutenant Edgar C. Merriman.

For months before the battle at Cape Fear took place some of the wise heads were predicting that we would never attack Fort Fisher in the same manner we had Port Royal, Mobile and New Orleans, but that we must have an army co-operation. In this they were all right; for we did have an army attack, as well as a naval assault.

According to a statement of the Secretary of the Navy to the President, there were one hundred and fifty vessels ready for attack upon Fort Fisher on October 15, 1864.

At that time the greater number of ships were at or near Hampton Roads and off the North Carolina coast in the vicinity of Cape Fear.

Admiral Porter had placed his ships under divisional leaders. Our ship, the *Minnesota*, was to lead into action the second division and was to be the leading ship, to follow the monitors and ironclads.

It was now generally known that General Bragg, of the Confederate Army, had gone from Richmond, Va., to Wilmington, N. C., in anticipation of an attack in that quarter. At this time the Confederate torpedo arrangements on the James river were keeping our vessels there very busy; also there were elaborate plans on foot in that wholesale method of destroying life at the approaches to the Cape Fear fortifications.

The Confederates were now really forced to desperation, for they could build no more ships, as iron was not obtainable; all timber to be had was in their forests, and it must be hewn out from the trees.

Our capture of prizes, valuable ones at that, was progressing

rapidly. We were in this way acquiring, almost daily, good, swift, Clyde-built vessels, while the Confederates and their friends across the Atlantic Ocean were losing their ships and money.

Confederate money was worth but little or nothing by this time abroad, and they were brought to the strait of swapping their cotton and tobacco, what little could be gotten out through the blockade, for the absolute necessities to sustain life.

In fourteen months under Acting Rear-Admiral S. P. Lee, we had captured fifty-two ocean steamers; and really it would seem that there was nothing left for those gallant men of the South to do but fight to the death, or at once abandon all hope of ever establishing a government to their own liking.

In November, 1864, a little over a month before the bombardment of Fort Fisher, our ships captured the fine 900-ton blockade-runner *Lady Sterling* off Wilmington; it was her first trip, bound out with a cargo of nearly a thousand bales of cotton and three tons of tobacco. That vessel had carried into Wilmington a valuable cargo.

The *Lady Sterling* cost \$250,000, and her outward cargo of cotton and tobacco was worth about \$400,000 more.

This was only one of the many valuable English-built vessels with valuable cargoes that were then being lost to the then weakened Confederate cause.

Preparations for operations upon a large scale went steadily along, and by December 1st it was whispered among the officers at the Roads that the garrison at Fort Fisher was to be paralyzed by the explosion of a mammoth torpedo, or a ship loaded with powder, and that all of the guns of the fort would certainly be dismantled.

Although there were many of us who regarded that report as a yarn only, yet, as it turned out, much of it came to pass. There was, however, no garrison paralyzed, nor was anybody's

guns dismounted, by the explosion of, some say 285, some 300, and others 215 tons, of powder in the steamer *Louisiana*.

On December 13th, at about 10 A. M., the powder-ship *Louisiana* passed under our stern and out of the capes of the Chesapeake Bay, in tow of the U. S. steamer *Sassacus*, bound for Cape Fear, to rattle Fort Fisher; and very soon we were all heading out for sea in the same direction.

Such a gathering of armed ships of war had never before been seen.

As we proceeded along the coast it was evident that the greatest event as yet known to our Navy was near at hand, and that the Confederates would likely soon lose their stronghold.

At 3.30 P. M., December 19, 1864, the *Minnesota* anchored off Fort Fisher. As I had, in another vessel, spent some time off that most forbidding, strongly fortified neck of land, sight of it at this time presented but little that was new.

Before the sun went down behind the long line of Confederate works we were called to quarters, given a talk, and put into harness for a desperate bombardment of Colonel Lamb's well-prepared garrison.

Then the night watches were set, and quiet was our ship. Little did I sleep, for thoughts had full sway during the long night. It constantly occurred to me—what a hellish roar it will be when all of these ships and the Confederate works get to firing.

A most charming night it was; here at anchor lay the ships, presenting dark lines and streaks upon the pea-green water on soundings, while just beyond to the westward, stretched out along the sands of Federal Point were the frowning, formidable works of the enemy.

To me that night the twinkling stars appeared more beautiful than I had ever before seen them; all surroundings wore a peaceful, quiet face; the sea was smooth, under a gentle south breeze,

with here and there schools of the finny tribes of the deep breaking water in their sports around our ship.

We were to watch for signal from the flagship, and when ordered to take position the *Minnesota* was to go ahead slowly and anchor about one mile from the fort.

December 23d a blockade-runner got in past our fleet at high tide. One of our soldier-sailors remarked: "I'll bet that Mrs. Tyler is on that steamer returning from Nassau." He then chuckled, again said: "I was on the steamer when Mrs. Tyler took passage for Nassau out from Wilmington, and heard it then said that she would return before Christmas." So we really had as one of our crew to battle with Fort Fisher a man who had been engaged in running supplies to the enemy and who was on a vessel that ex-President Tyler's widow went out from Wilmington to Nassau on board of. This man had been captured running the blockade, and was sent North on our prize, and instead of doing as others did—go to Halifax and re-engage for a run—he joined our Volunteer Army for pay as a substitute.

#### BREAD SUPPLY IN FORT FISHER RUNNING SHORT.

On this day, December 23d, the commander at Fort Fisher telegraphed to Major Hill, at Wilmington, N. C.: "Where is the bread which was to be sent? I have only supply to the 31st. Please send hardtack."

So it will be seen that the garrison of Fort Fisher at that time had but eight days' supply of bread.

December 24th, at 5.15 A. M., the *Minnesota*, 48 guns, got under way and stood towards Fort Fisher, and anchored in line of battle 2,100 yards distant from the fort. Weather fine, sea smooth, with light southerly breeze. At 12 noon beat to quarters for action. Our noon meal was hardtack and coffee

which was passed up from the fire-room, all other fires being put out.

At about 1 P. M. the *New Ironsides* and monitors alone opened fire upon the enemy's works; we were now just one mile east half north of the northeast angle of Fort Fisher, with the "Mound" battery bearing southwest.

The batteries fired pretty lively at us; their third and fifth shots passed close over our deck, while our shells were being hurled into the fort rapidly. Other large vessels of the fleet were soon at it, and they all did some excellent work.

A fire broke out in the fort; this our masthead lookout attributed to our ship's shell; a shot from the enemy cut the spring on our cable; at about three o'clock the flag on the fort was shot away; the *Minnesota's* flying-jib stay, fore-royal and foretop-gallant stays were all shot away. The enemy were now firing high.

The sailors at our guns, many of them, were stripped to their waists, and were warming up to the work when at 6 P. M. we withdrew from action, leaving a buoy to mark anchorage for to-morrow, then stood off shore and anchored six or seven miles northeast of the fort.

Into this day's fight the frigates *Colorado*, *Minnesota*, and *Wabash* carried the largest number of guns of any of the ships of the squadron. Total guns of their combined batteries numbered 146—52, 48, and 46, respectively.

When we consider that these were only three of the 37 ships that were hurling shot and shells at the Confederate works some idea can be formed as to what a hellish hot place Federal Point must have been during the firing of our guns.

Christmas eve this! and what for to-morrow? which is Sunday, and the anniversary of the One who came into the world to save all mankind; and on this day, in all probability, we will be



using our best efforts to kill our brothers, as well as risking being launched into eternity.

“The bursting shell, the gateway rent asunder,  
The rattling musketry, the clashing blade;  
And ever and anon, in tones of thunder,  
The diapason of the cannonade.”

#### DECEMBER 25TH, SUNDAY AND CHRISTMAS.

Someone before breakfast at our mess table actually offered thanks aloud to God; and strange as it seemed, on board a busy man-of-war, somehow all of us appeared to feel better for that.

At 9.30 A. M. the big ship was again underway. At 10.45 the *New Ironsides* began firing at Fort Fisher, then soon the Monitors, all four of them, opened fire very rapidly. The momentary lull for our ship gave us the opportunity to witness the truly thundering, hellish rattle of a first-class bombardment by so many ships with big guns, and now I do not wonder at the partial deafness of so many of us who were there.

At about 11:15 A. M. the *Minnesota* was again at it, from a new position, three hundred yards nearer the fort than yesterday. We had opened fire with our forward guns, and when the anchor was down, with suitable scope of cable, the men were stripped to their waists for battle, then the flag-ship signalled “cease firing.”

There was a slight grumble passed along the decks from gun to gun. Sailors, you’ve heard, *will* “growl” when they fail in getting all they wish for; but very soon the men were permitted to lie down at quarters, Commander Rhind came alongside and informed Commodore Lanman that he had placed a buoy 150 to 200 yards nearer the fort for us. Some of the crew hearing that wanted to cheer.

At 1 P. M. we were in the new position with a kedge anchor out astern and port-bower anchor down, and began firing by

divisions at the fort, "Mound," and batteries. The first shot from the enemy touched our main-stay, the next one struck the ship below the water-line; hauled out the spanker to steady the ship broadside to the enemy; just then a 30-pounder shell came in through our midship port on the spar-deck and went through one of the launches and the first cutter, lodging in the stern-sheets of the latter boat.

At 2 o'clock hot coffee was served to all hands. At 4 P. M. brailled up the spanker, and then a shell from the fort exploded on our chain armor, starboard side. Although many Confederate shells burst immediately over the decks of the ship, scattering fragments to both sides, not one of them did us any harm.

Soon after 4 P. M. the Confederate flag was shot away the second time, and considering the firing of the monitors and all of the largest wooden vessels at that time, the gallant enemy held to their guns wonderfully well.

When the flag fell from the fort's northeast salient, the ships ceased firing until 4:45 P. M.; then we again opened fire more rapidly than we had before, and the roar of the cannon was something terrible; every particle of flesh upon one's bones seemed to be slipping off, eyes stinging, and we were almost blinded by powder, smoke, and refuse; the guns and our clothing were almost white from saltpeter.

Several men at my gun, the eleven-inch pivot, bled at the nose; yet none of them flinched, but kept to their stations.

Less than an hour of that sort of firing seemed an age at the great guns, and it was truly an age of indescribable torture. I was told by those who were at the guns between decks, that they also suffered terribly during the rapid firing.

At 5:15 P. M. we got the anchors, then steamed off shore. I had to, in my poor way, utter a silent prayer for those brave men in Fort Fisher, and did they mean for us to kill everyone of them?

This day there were some pieces of shells imbedded in our ship's hull, but as these were all above the water-line, they were allowed to remain.

The sun went down on this day of all days, "The anniversary of the Prince of Peace," and now for a spell of quiet.

The stillness on board was almost as unbearable as had been the rapid firing and we preferred to keep at it with the guns.

So ended our Christmas of 1864, and we had hurled shot and shell enough at the Federal Point works to lay a cast-iron pavement the entire circuit of its beach.

In the two days we fired 20,775 pounds of powder from the eleven-inch, nine-inch, 100-pdr. and 150-pdr. guns on the *Minnesota* alone. All projectiles fired were loaded and fused shells. and the total number of them fired was 1,982.

Now if you will for one moment give it thought, it can easily be realized, considering the number of ships that were in the battle, what an enormous amount of cast iron was hurled at the fortifications during the two days' bombardment.

In the two days the whole fleet fired 20,271 projectiles at the Confederate works, which fired at our ships, 1,390 projectiles.

Colonel Lamb's garrison on Christmas day was 1,371 officers, soldiers and sailors. There were 63 of them only killed and wounded; Five of his gun-carriages were disabled, and two of his 7-inch Brook guns burst in firing.

As the *Minnesota's* position was on the 25th so close to the fort our firing told more effectively, and we could plainly see that our shells were knocking the lines of the fort's ramparts into all manner of shapes, as well as the batteries along the sea face.

Commodore Lanman meant to have it understood that the *Minnesota* went into the fight for the purpose of demolishing Fort Fisher, and putting the works in such shape as to permit General Butler to capture them and the garrison.

December 26th and 27th our magazines and shell-rooms were

refilled from ordnance schooners, using five of the ship's boats for that purpose.

It was now quite evident that the Army had failed to get possession of Fort Fisher, for on the 27th the troops that had been landed to battle with the Confederates were, the most of them, taken on board of the Army transports and at once started northward; the troops that were left upon the beach were soon afterward taken off by our ships' boats.

On this day the 27th a risky blockade-runner, between 4 and 6 P. M., got in past our fleet and over the bar safely.

After the magazines and shell-rooms were filled all hands were served with fish-hooks and lines, and we took many fish; everybody had a good time, as well as a feast of fresh fish.

We had fish fresh, fish corned, fish salted down in half pork and beef barrels, fish with their heads on, fish beheaded, fish with roes, and fish-roes both fresh and salted. In truth, we had fish enough. When sailors say enough it is time to quit.

The effects of that day's sport were noticeable to the last of my being on the *Minnesota*; many were the good jokes cracked during the sailors' smoking hours, touching upon the fishing picnic. It was most truly a grand picnic for all hands. As the sun was setting on the 28th, almost all the squadron, *all*, except the regular blockaders, were underway and standing to the northward to ride out a storm, off the bar or in the "bight" near Beaufort, N. C. To-day two blockade-runners got in, the *Banshee* and the *Wild Rover* from Nassau, and the *Little Hattie* got out for Nassau.

#### THE SQUADRON ARRIVES OFF BEAUFORT.

The monitors and other light-draft vessels went into the harbor, while all of the larger ships for about 48 to 50 hours rode out one of the heaviest gales that was ever witnessed.

Colonel Lamb stated in his official report, made after we left Cape Fear: "I am unable to know what damage was done them (our ships), but I am certain the injury inflicted upon them far exceeds the injury their bombardment did us. Our Heavenly Father has protected my garrison this day, and I feel that He will sustain us in defending our homes from the invader."

During the heavy gale the *Juniata* and several other ships had to slip and heave-to at sea throughout the storm, but they all came through it and got back to anchorage without other loss than a few anchors.

We spent two weeks off Beaufort, and were then, on the 12th of January, 1865, made happy by the sound of the "calls" of the boatswain and his mates summoning all hands up anchor. We all fell in at our stations, and as is usual on big ships-of-war, we were scattered, and all of us did not again meet at the mess table. I feel sad to relate that we have never since then met one another, for after that, and forever separated by battle, we went to our meals only when relieved from watch on deck.

The whole fleet was now on the move with General Alfred Terry and his transports loaded with troops.

#### PART TAKEN BY THE "MINNESOTA" IN THE SECOND BOMBARDMENT, ASSAULT UPON AND FINAL CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER.

Please do not think that I would have you believe that this good old wooden frigate was the only vessel there, and that her officers and men did it all; but that grand old ship, which was recently sold and broken up for junk, *was* there, and she and her officers and crew played quite a conspicuous part in that, the greatest combined Army and Navy engagement of the age, against the strongest fort of its sort that was ever known.

At about 5 A. M. January 13th, we stood in toward the fort,

and anchored in close line of battle, one ship's length ahead of the *Brooklyn*. At 8.30 A. M. commenced shelling the woods north of Fort Fisher, firing slowly. We were now 800 yards from the beach, with the frigate *Colorado* off our port quarter.

Eleven of our boats were gotten out, and there was a race with the boats from all of the ships for the Army transports, in our effort to make the first landing with troops.

At about 9 A. M. the ships all ceased firing, and in about five and a half hours we had landed 8,500 soldiers, some mules, field guns, intrenching tools, hard bread for six days, and some ammunition.

One officer named Tanner, in the landing of troops, did a greater work than any of us. He took the soldiers in his boat and at the same time towed the mules, landing them all at rapid rate. General Terry was also landed by Tanner. Judging from the braying and lively kicking by the mules when they were clear of the surf and had struck the beach, they were happy notwithstanding they must soon face the enemy.

That officer's arrangement was called "Tanner's Ferry."

By 5.20 P. M. the *Minnesota* was in a new position, about 1,600 yards from the fort, east by north of its northeast salient.

We opened fire. Wind was light from southwest, thus blowing the smoke seaward from our guns, and affording a clear view of the enemy's works throughout the bombardment. We could also see the movements of our troops to the northward of the Confederate works.

The sky was clear, air balmy, and as the sun went down, casting the shadows of the fort and batteries seaward, the sombre hues in purple and dark grays, softened and blended into the brilliant sun-tints upon the edges of the battle-smoke; it was a sight once seen never to be forgotten.

Up to 6 P. M. this day, January 13th, the *Minnesota* and other ships put in some effective shots. Ours were 11-inch, 9-inch,

and 150-pdr. shells. Then we retired at about 7 P. M. from the fight, and anchored two or three miles off shore, while the *New Ironsides* and monitors held to their positions for the next day's battle.

#### JANUARY 14, 1865.

This is one of my happy days on board ship among sailors, many of whom I had been with, not only in battle before, but also upon detached duty in boat expeditions; and to be with such a body of well-trying men, good, honest, brave fellows under fire, was a chance in a lifetime for the study of human nature.

These men who now knew that they were to go on shore to assault the fort appeared to be anxious for the job; yet they openly expressed admiration for the gallantry of the enemy, as well as sympathy. One of the men said: "How did they hold out against the terrible firing from the ships?"

#### FORT FISHER FALLS INTO OUR HANDS.

At about 4 A. M., on Sunday, January 15, 1865, all hands were called "Up anchor." We stood inshore, and at 7.30 got out all boats, and sent them with picks and spades to the shore, for the use of intrenching parties.

Companies were made up, equipped and then dismissed with orders to "stand by for a call."

The whole crew were willing to go, and appeared anxious to finish the job. As it was, many of the firemen and coal passers went with us.

We were then called to quarters, and at 9.15 A. M. the *Minnesota* alone was signalled to proceed and take position. We were so close this time (within 1,400 yards) to the fort that the enemy could be seen at work preparing to give us the best there was left in their battered works.

We were ordered to fire by divisions and dismount the guns on Fort Fisher. The ship now lay at a kedge anchor and a spring-line made fast to the *New Ironsides*, when a lively firing was opened upon the works from our 11-inch pivot, gun-deck batteries and the 150-pounder alternately. After the fire from the gun-deck divisions, the enemy ceased firing.

At 10 A. M. orders were given, "Prepare to land." There were many small personal matters attended to hurriedly; letters with last words added to them were passed over for mailing; also there were sailors trinkets and keepsakes left to be forwarded by shipmates who were to remain on board, to kindred of those who might fall in battle.

As we were leaving the ship at 11 o'clock, officers and crew remaining on board gave us three cheers. The whole fleet appeared now to open fire upon the enemy's works; pieces of shell, tin straps and sabots of the shell from our vessels, together with shot and shell from shore batteries, came splashing and whistling among our boats. Fortunately, though strange, however, there was no one injured by either the enemy's firing or that of the ships.

It was a grand sight to see so many sailors on the strong pull for the landing, and it was fortunate to be landed safely through the surf with dry ammunition.

All of the men who were transferred to our ship from the army, were given Sharp's rifles, while the older members of the crew were armed with cutlasses and revolvers.

Landed for the assault, were one company of riflemen, 49 men, under Lieutenant Woodward; 47 men under Acting Ensign Birtwistle; 47 men under Acting Ensign O'Connor, and my company of 44 men, and the ship's marines under Captain George Butler, of the Marine Guard, on the *Minnesota*. We were all under Lieutenant Commander James Parker, the *Min-*



*nesota's* Executive Officer. Assistant Surgeon Wiiliam Longshaw went with us to attend the wounded.

We landed about one and a half to two miles above the fort, then formed companies in line along the beach, when the whole were divided into three divisions, each division to be under the senior officer of the ship divisions, and the marines to be under their senior officer on shore. More than 2,000 officers, marines and sailors were landed.

Upon landing, I was at once detailed and told to select my men for intrenching at the front. Before I could do that the whole company stepped to the front, and there were more than it was intended I should take. We intrenchers advanced, and under directions from Lieutenants Preston and Porter succeeded in digging one rifle-pit for our sharpshooters without the loss of a man killed.

Several received slight wounds, however, and we were under a galling fire from a hateful gun mounted upon a field carriage at the fort's salliport, as well as musketry along the land face.

Together with musketry, canister and grape fired by the enemy in front of us, and fragments of bursting shell fired by our ships at the rear and left of us, intrenching near the face of Fort Fisher was not a very pleasant job, and we who were thus engaged were not long in throwing up enough sand to temporarily protect the few marines who were covering us with muskets.

Lieutenant Preston came running from the rear, and ordered me to advance obliquely to front and left and to dig a trench three feet deep. He then turned to my right and was giving orders to Assistant Engineer Holton when suddenly, like chaff before a gale, they all vanished. Preston was killed, and I was afterwards informed that an acting ensign named Smally finished Holton's rifle-pit.

We were then in one of the warmest, if not the very worst, places on the seaside; but I am quite sure that the soldiers over

on the river side were having it hot from the Confederates' fire, yet from statements by Colonel Lamb we Navy men, just then, received the greatest amount of attention from the garrison of the fort, for our assault was considered and treated as the main attack to be made.

When I got to the next point for throwing up sand, it was so close to the palisades that we were out of the range of the enemy's great guns upon the ramparts; but the confounded "Napoleon" at the base and center of the land face gave us an occasional raking with grape-shot, when not doing the same thing for other intrenchers.

Now we could see in front of us only one dark, frowning, forbidding line of the fort stretched out across Federal Point. About seventy-five to one hundred yards in front of the palisades, and among wires to torpedoes imbedded in the sand to blow us up, we soon had sand enough in front of us for protection against small-arm fire; but this was accomplished by the sacrifice of several brave men who were shot dead and many others wounded. It was fortunate for us that the battery connections to the torpedoes in the sand did not work; if they had we should all have been among the missing.

Marines, under Captain L. L. Dawson, of the *Colorado*, filled the last rifle-pit I made, and very soon, as the naval force came up along the beach, I saw Mr. Parker, our Executive, at the head of the column. He hailed me: "Come on, Simms, fall in with your men; we're going to assault!"

I wedged the few men into dead men's places, and, not knowing where the balance of my company were, I went to the head of the line on Mr. Parker's right. He said: "Go with your company," when some officer on Parker's left said: "Let him come along." At the time I thought Lieut. Lamson was on Parker's left; but it may have been that Lieut. Commander Cushman of the *Wabash* was there.

Between the point where I joined the assaulting party, and the fort there was no halt before we reached the palisades, and when we were within about twenty yards of them we at the head of the column turned obliquely to the right, at a point one hundred and fifty yards from the fort, and ran to an opening that the ships' shells had made, when suddenly the enemy gave us the full benefit of their convictions—that we were making the main assault; and this, I have since been informed, was the opinion of the commander of the fort at that time.

Our Executive Officer wore a long rain-coat, which was gray in color, and when he raised both arms it gave him the appearance of a large size bat or a small flying machine. I have often wondered how in the world he escaped being shot by either our men or the enemy.

Some one has said that Lieutenant Commander K. Randolph Breese was upon Mr. Parker's left in the advance. So far as I *know* he may have been there, for then I did not know either Breese, Lamson or Cushman by sight, but did become acquainted with both Lamson and Cushman, where I fell wounded. All three of them were at the front, however, and both Cushman and Lamson were wounded.

With the severe fire of the enemy's musketry it was utterly impossible for more than sixty to one hundred of us who were already at the front to advance. Our column was cut in two, and at least two-thirds of the sailors wavered under the withering showers of bullets the Confederates were sending among them.

At that time I judged there were 150 to 200 marines and sailors who stubbornly advanced and who were finally compelled to take shelter under the second angle of the palisades, which ran from along the land face of the fort to and around the north-east salient at the sea face and then to the beach.

Acting Master's Mate A. F. Aldrich, of the *Tuscarora*, with

marine Thompson and myself of the *Minnesota*, and a sailor whom I took to be a petty officer, got through the opening in the palisades within fifty yards of the fort, when the sailor sprang into the air and fell shot through the breast.

Here we were checked. Fortunately for me that I was not so tall as Mr. Parker, for had I been a Confederate bullet would have gone through my throat instead of the top and front of my cap.

I made for the next angle, followed closely by Aldrich. We had made but a few steps when I was shot. Aldrich forged a few steps further and then sang out: "I'm shot." I tried to step and my leg gave way and down I went. Aldrich got back under the palisades where others were. I got to my feet again but soon fell. Then some one sang out, "They're retreating!" I again got up and yelled "cowards!" I had said this in the excitement of the moment, not seeing that the Confederates poured volleys of their hellish fire into the ranks of the staggering sailors and marines whom Breese and others were vainly endeavoring to rally to a second charge.

When upon my feet this time Mr. Parker sang out to me: "Lie down, Simms; lie down! There are two holes in you!" I fell.

It would have been impossible for men made of tougher material than flesh to have withstood that firing, and for others to advance to where we now were; neither would the palisades afford shelter for more than were already under them.

It was the proper thing for them to retreat, for those who did get away did good work soon afterward in conjunction with the Army, who by this time were fighting their way into the Confederate works from the Cape Fear river side.

The Confederates had completely broken us up, where the marines and sailors were thickest, also shattered the few of us

who got to the front, forcing some down to the beach end of the stockade and a few closer up under the fort.

The Admiral had ordered that the charge be made around the end of the palisade, which was at least 200 yards from the fort's sea-face, and at the beach ; but as there were some of us at the head of the assaulting column who were at the front when that order was read, we led on towards the weakest point in the fort, knowing nothing of any order to do otherwise than get there. Truly there were many lives saved by our rush for the opening in the palisades nearest to the fort, as well as at the most damaged spot along the ramparts.

The shrieks and groans, mingling with the fiendish rattling around us, together with the whistling bullets and the bursting shell over us, was enough to cause one to feel that he was in that place which General Sherman once described as answering to the name of war.

I was soon alone upon my bed in the sand, with the protruding Confederate naval battery upon my left and the lofty salient above me, while from between them came the fire of musketry, giving good cause for my thinking that all was up with me this time. An occasional shell from some ship of ours struck uncomfortably near, some bursting and scattering their fragments in all directions, while a few landed were smoking only.

As officers and enlisted men were shot and fell upon the beach all along the line, from the beginning to the centre, the roaring surf afforded some of them "winding sheets," and those men were reckoned among the "missing."

As darkness of the night came the ships ceased firing over us ; then with a sudden volley the enemy showered their hot lead at the small crowd of officers and sailors at the palisade. Very soon rapid, rattling musketry was heard upon the west side of the fort, where evidently our Army was getting into close action with the enemy ; so now we were "let alone" upon the sea-front.

I cannot state from personal observation anything relating to the fight that was then, after dark, going on between our boys in blue and the brave ones in gray beyond saying that from the continual rattle and roaring of guns there was hell to pay over their way.

It can easily be imagined what a desperate hand-to-hand battle it must have been, and, from truthful statements of those Army men who passed through the bloody scene under the light of the stars, it was something almost beyond description.

Three marines from our ship, Corporal Ranahan and privates Thompson and Shivers, and ordinary seaman Thomas Connor, were with the few who were at the palisades. One of them came to me where I lay on the sand, and Connor assisted others to carry me off the field.

There were others near us, strewn upon the sand between us and the beach. Many were dead and some were groaning and dying, while some few were crawling off, leaving blood-stained sand marking the spot where they fell and courses taken.

Lieutenants R. H. Lamson and J. R. Bartlett, Ensigns J. Hoban Sands and Robley Evans were there. The first three got well up to the front. Evans was wounded, and, according to official report, he fell near the end of the palisade near the beach. I have met all of these officers since the Civil War.

The sailor who entered the palisade with Aldrich and myself and was killed, I have since learned, was found where he fell the next morning by Acting Ensign F. P. B. Sands, of the *Gettysburg*. This officer, with the commander of the *Gettysburg* and his crew, was in our division, which Lieutenant Commander James Parker commanded in the assault, and Sands received promotion shortly after the fall of the Cape Fear fortifications.

While I lay groaning I made the acquaintance of Cushman and Lamson. These two and Mr. Parker looked well to the care

of our wounded ; after dark Mr. Cushman crawled across me in the dark, begged pardon, and said, " Come, get away ! "

Another officer ventured over where I lay, whom Cushman called Lamson. When they found that I could not move they both said I would soon be taken off. To me, just then, their remarks had a double meaning.

Excepting the groans from the wounded and dying, and the murmuring, moaning sea along shore, or now and then a stray shot from one of our men in the sand-hills, and its acknowledgment by one of the enemy who remained upon the fort's parapet to take care of us while their main force was engaged with our Army a thousand yards towards the river, it was comparatively quiet.

I am telling you, my friends, that the U. S. frigate *Minnesota's* officers, sailors and marines were at the front, and, naturally enough, there were many of them found killed and wounded there.

The wound that I received at Fort Fisher was an extremely bad and painful one ; the bullet struck on the inside, just above the right knee, passing fourteen inches through the thigh ; it struck the pelvis bone and escaped at the hip.

As the darkness had closed in around us, and after the visit from Cushman and Lamson, our Executive, Mr. Parker, came across the sand and gave me a stimulant ; in doing so he came very near to not having any left to give any one else ; for it was so deliciously warming and strengthening that when I had shut my teeth down upon the neck of his flask, I almost played turtle, by closing my eyes and forgetting to let go. I did let go, however, before the kind man's flask was emptied.

From the loss of blood I had become very weak, and prayed for death to come, but not from the death-blow of one of our own ships. One good fellow, who twisted his neck-handkerchief about my hip, received a bullet and then crawled off to-

wards others at the palisade. That poor fellow had rolled me into a hollow in the sand, and when he was shot he muttered something about his mother, "and, if I get through," &c.

I had seen our officers and men shot down at the water edge during the advance upon the fort, at the immediate approach to the slope; also at the palisade, where it was impossible to aid them off the field before dark.

There were few, if any, who fell within one hundred yards of the fort who reached the temporary hospital on the sand up the beach; but those who were wounded further away were taken there by their comrades.

Every officer but one of the *Minnesota* reached the palisades. Our lieutenant of marines had his company of sharpshooters in the sand-hills near us and east of the northeast salient, and they kept up an enfilading fire up the slope to the fort from where, upon the ramparts, the Confederates could fire down upon us.

As already stated I lay where I fell well into the dark of the night, and as there was no other music but the murmuring, splashing sea upon the beach, mingling with the moans and groans of our wounded who were unable to get away, I joined in the choir and groaned to my heart's content from between 3 and 4 o'clock to 8 P. M. In this time all things from my early childhood flashed through my brain.

According to Secretary Wells's report, thirty-seven of the vessels bombarded Federal Point works, with nineteen reserve vessels on the outer line.

In a letter to Major Hill, at Wilmington, Colonel Lamb expressed the wish for some 12 x 12-inch timber and 3-inch plank to enable him to mount four guns which Hill desired around the "Mound" battery. The Colonel also wrote that he needed negroes, as he had not been able to repair earthworks, and, said he, "I am ready to repel Admiral Porter; but if you give me five hundred negroes and enough timber to mount guns I



will make him leave some of his vessels behind." The Colonel said he needed the 500 negroes to take the place of 200 worn-out ones he then had, who could do no work.

At about 8 P. M. Mr. Parker came with four sailors and took me to the beach. I was put into Lamson's gig (boat) and sent off to the *Minnesota*. Shortly after I was on board and swung in a cot in the ward room of the big ship there was a great cheering on deck, blowing of whistles, and a lurid glare of rocket lights. Then I knew that it all meant that Fort Fisher had fallen into our hands; so I joined in the cheering. Some one said that the fort surrendered at 10 P. M.

During the three days of the second bombardment of Fort Fisher the whole fleet expended 19,682 projectiles, making a total weight of 2,927,937 pounds of iron and powder hurled against the fort and batteries in both bombardments, in five days, December 24 and 25, 1864, and January 13, 14 and 15, 1865.

With the fall of Fort Fisher and its adjoining batteries Fort Caswell was evacuated and blown up, Bald-Head and Fort Shaw were destroyed, Fort Campbell was abandoned, and one hundred and sixty-eight guns of heavy calibre were captured, all nearly within gunshot of Fort Fisher.

After the fort had surrendered Mr. Parker came on board, and as daylight was peeping in through air-ports he came to me and asked for my home address. After I was in hospital several weeks my mother sent me a letter that Mr. Parker had written to her, of which the following is a copy:

U. S. FRIGATE "MINNESOTA,"

OFF WILMINGTON, N. C.,

*January 16, 1865.*

DEAR MADAM: Your gallant son yesterday, in assaulting Fort Fisher, was wounded. His wound is not dangerous,

though severe ; no bones broken. He goes to Naval Hospital at Norfolk, Virginia, by same vessel with this.

His conduct was splendidly gallant, and we regret that he did not escape unhurt.

He will be recommended for promotion.

With best wishes, yours truly,

(Signed) JAMES PARKER,

*Lieutenant Commander.*

MRS. ANN SIMMS,

*Washington.*

As this long night of intense suffering was about drawing to a close, and as day dawned, the prettiest daybreak I had ever before witnessed, it was to me a most welcome sight, for I could see the beam of heaven's pure light gleaming in through the airport abreast of me, in the big ship's side.

I now thanked God that I was alive, while only eight hours before that I had offered a prayer longing for death, and at that time would gladly have welcomed it.

“ Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.”

I was with others wounded sent to the *Santiago de Cuba*, and by that vessel taken to the hospital at Norfolk, where I roomed for seven weeks with William F. Pratt, J. F. Merry, now admiral, retired ; L. R. Chester, now lieutenant, retired ; A. F. Aldrich and E. K. Green, all of whom were officers of the Volunteer Navy, and were wounded at Fort Fisher.

While I do not intimate that the fall of Fort Fisher was the all-important event which settled the then “so-called rebellion,” I do contend that, with the capture of that important stronghold at Cape Fear, the war must soon end ; and so it did, for the main

channel through which the Confederates had been, through the whole four years of the war, receiving foreign aid and supplies was now closed.

And now that good old flag, the Stars and Stripes, is the only banner for all sections of our grand and glorious country.

“ Long may it wave o’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

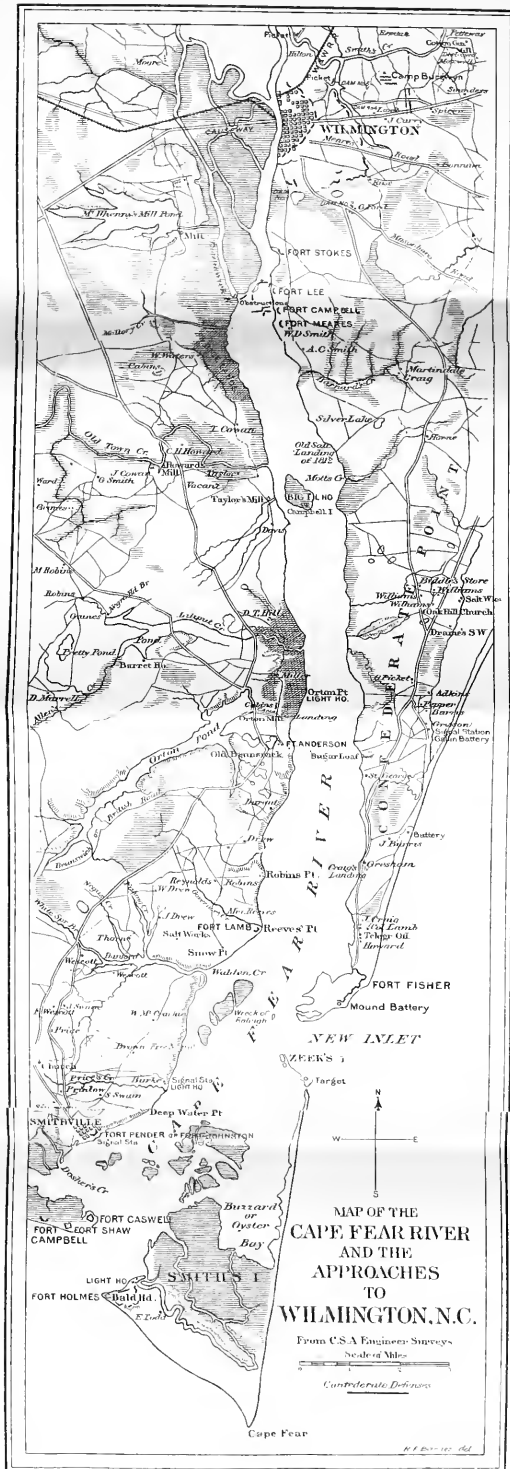




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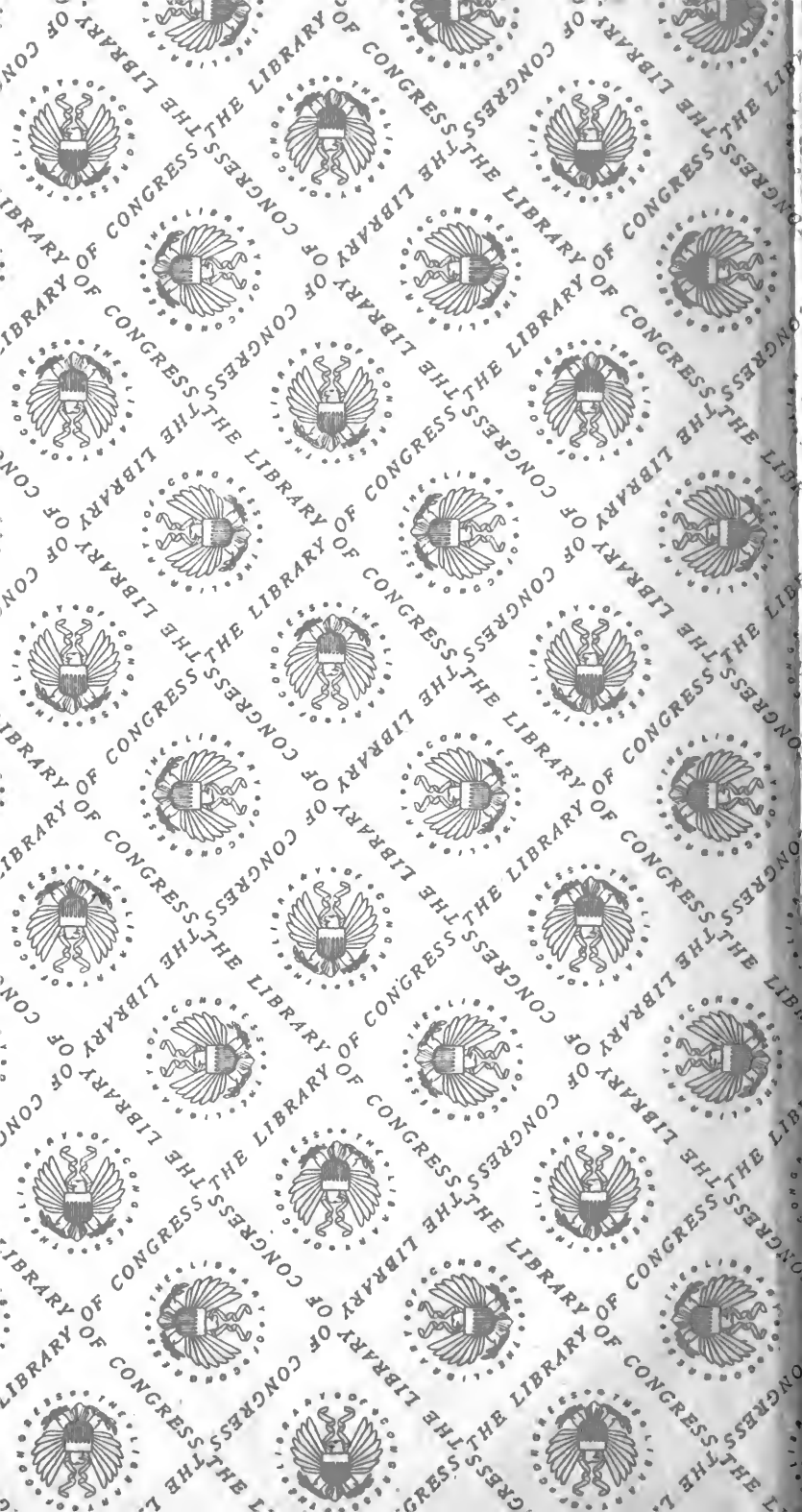
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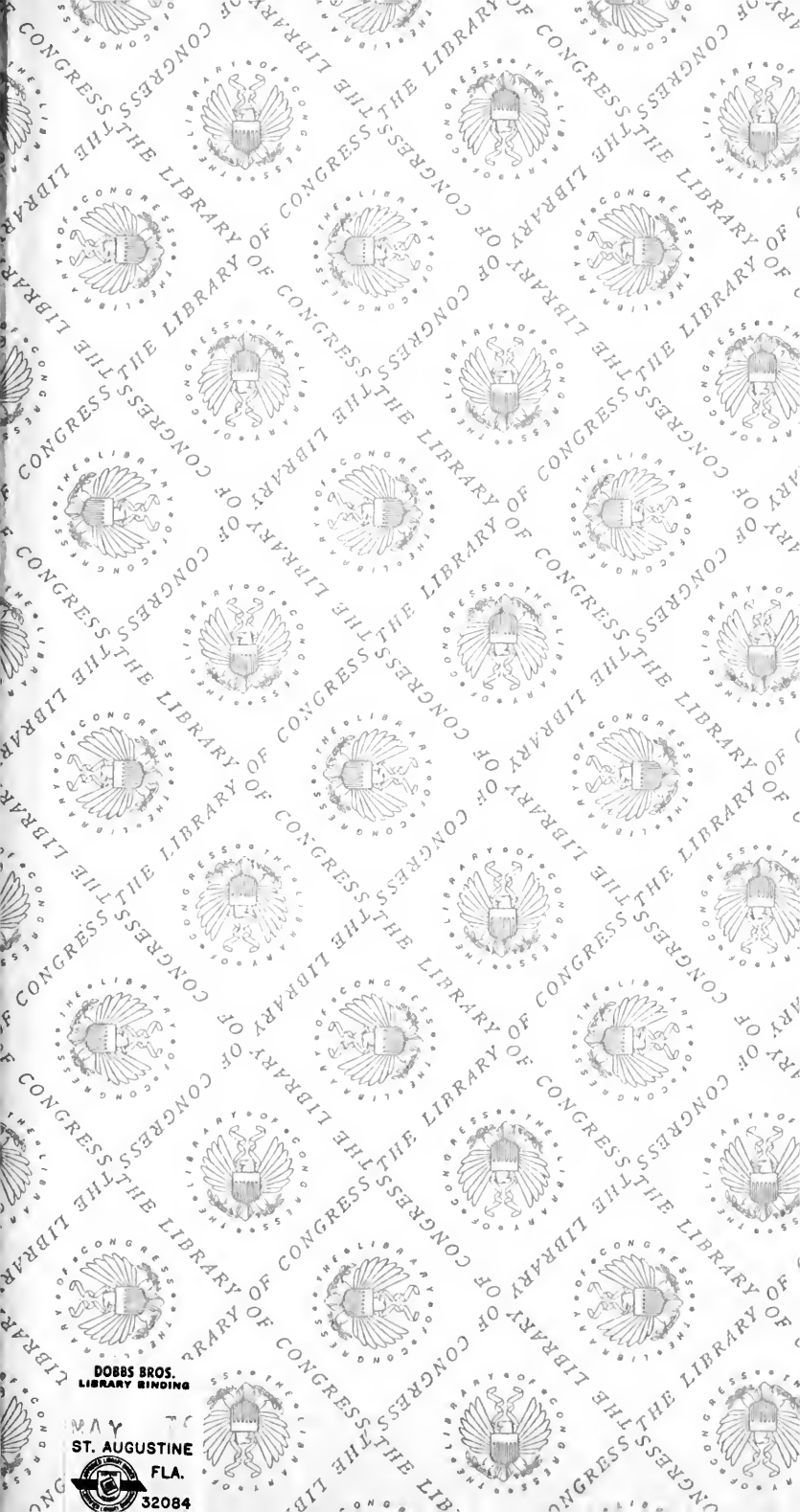












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